

Notes from Miller, disgust

Rozin 1999 "Disgust," in *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*, ed. T. Dalgleish & M. Power, Chichester UK: Wiley.

two laws of sympathetic magic:
Contagion and similarity
Disgust

Other areas in which such boundary transgression may occur are sexual intrusion and bodily infringements associated with medical care, parenting, or abuse. But even in these circumstances (which may, indeed, bring disgust), which is outside seldom becomes self, except when substances are left behind by the intrusion (semen, for example, or material injected through the skin). Semen often disgusts, but injected material rarely does—perhaps because the content is seen as sterile, not brimming with life.

Humans obviously are engineered with a readiness to develop disgust as one of the affect-maturational trajectories of childhood. The disgust category we develop over time remains, however, a roughly bounded denomination of emotional response, the edges of which are imperfect and challenging to map (Miller, 1986, 1993). This complexity is evident in the large variety of words the English language offers us for what elicits disgust-like experience: revolting, repulsive, offensive, vile, gross, gruesome, sickening, nauseating, and putrid, among others.

In anthropology, psychology, and cognitive science, the term magical thinking is used to describe causal reasoning that accords unwarranted weight to correlation or coincidence. It often includes such ideas as the ability of the mind to affect the physical world (see the philosophical problem of mental causation). Associative thinking may be brought into play, as well as the power of magical symbols, synchronicity, metaphor and metonym.

In both theory and practice, magic does not conform to more modern views of causality. For this reason, the practice of magic, or belief in it, has been described as irrational. For theorists, answering the question of whether magical thinking is rational requires inquiry into the thinker's thought process and intentions, and into the efficacy of his or her practice.